

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 9:30-37

***"Just As A Child"***

I love that story from the Old Testament, from Jonah – he is sitting there trying to get some shade, and it just doesn't happen for him. He gets angry, so the Lord says to him – what are you getting so angry about? Don't we find ourselves getting angry about things? I know yesterday, I was going to mail that letter to the Parish, and I am on Gaskin Ave. heading south, and there was a train that was stuck. I sat for over 25 minutes, and it was crazy! I didn't get angry I just said it is about time for me to 'enjoy the blessing of the bypass.' I worked my way around and then to the bypass, and over to 158 and to the Post Office. The train was still there! You find yourself sitting in a line like that and sometimes we might be thinking words that we don't like to say very often – and why is this thing happening? It might have been what was going on with the apostles as Jesus was telling them the truth of what was going to happen – and they didn't really get what was going on. Rather than getting angry, they should have been going to ask Him! They were afraid.

Remember last week's Holy Gospel with Jesus telling the Apostles, "*This kind can come out only by prayer.*" (Mark 9:29) Jesus was explaining that people cannot do anything like this by themselves especially trying to drive out some evil spirits. Prayer is necessary. How many times have I reminded folks that the simplest prayer is 'help me Jesus.' He welcomes that! Then of course, don't forget to say 'thank you Jesus.' Now the Apostles are following Jesus on a journey – their last journey to Jerusalem. He is leading His disciples toward the culmination of His ministry and to the cross. This was time for Jesus to focus on teaching His disciples. He needed to equip them to carry on the ministry when He ascended to the Father, and to prepare them for the events to come – which were not going to be easy. When Jesus was arrested in the garden – they ran! They took off! They just didn't understand yet. They struggled to get their minds around the fact that Jesus often says things that have a clear meaning on the surface, but He wants them to look under the surface as well and find a hidden meaning somewhere else. And now, Jesus tells them something which we realize that He means literally; and they are baffled, they are blown away, because they are looking for a hidden meaning and can't find it.

Jesus is being straight forward with them, as He approaches Jerusalem and His upcoming suffering and death - He is simply trying to tell them what He can see is going to happen. He will be handed over; He will be killed; but then there is the hope - He will rise again. Why couldn't they understand? You see that was not even on their radar – and because of their understanding of what a Messiah might do, and the culture made them hear that when the Messiah comes – He will be a warrior who would push down the Romans. What really threw them for a loop was when Jesus told them: "*The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.*" (Mark 9:31)

They were trying to figure out who is this 'Son of Man?' and was even though they heard Jesus say this over and over again – they could not connect the dots. For us, who know the truth

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about Jesus, it is easier because we know the ending. We can go to the Book of Revelation (singular – not plural!) and see exactly how it plays out – we know that Jesus wins and Satan loses. Good Jews of the day knew that this phrase echoes the great dream-picture in Daniel 7, where ‘*one like a son of man*’, referring to ‘*the people of the saints of the most high*’. They didn’t see that Jesus was talking about Himself, He might as well have said “I am going to...” but He was trying to tell them of the relationship with God the Father. He is the Son of Man, the representative – the perfect man. They did not see that Jesus was talking about Himself, the One that Peter proclaimed at Caesarea Philippi, when Jesus asked the “who do people say that I am” and they gave Him a big, long list. Then Jesus asked them “who do YOU say that I am?” That is a question that ‘he could very well ask us today, here at St. Andrew’s Anglican Church - “who do you say that Jesus is?” Peter jumped up and said, “*that you are the Christ – the Son of the Living God.*” (Matthew 16) Jesus told Peter that he didn’t say those words on his own, but because Jesus’ Father gave those words to him. It still doesn’t seem to have sunk in. They also didn’t quite understand Jesus saying, ‘*after three days He will rise.*’ Peter, James, and John had just been at the Transfiguration, just before this Gospel event they came down the mountain, after seeing Jesus between Moses (the Law) and Elijah (the Prophets) glowing in all glory, and then they came down and saw the man (last week) whose son had the demons driven out – and this is a continuation of that. Mark records in Mark 9:9-10, “*As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what “rising from the dead” meant.*” Most Jews, especially the Pharisees believed that God would raise the dead bodily at the end of the present age, but they were not expecting that one person would rise from the dead in their very midst, in their very same time frame. They were becoming more and more confused by Jesus’ words.

Can you imagine how Jesus must have been frustrated and disappointed that His disciples could only worry about their own status – of which one was the greatest - instead of what was happening to their Lord and Master. That’s the trouble when you only getting half the message – the half that they wanted to understand. They thought if Jesus is Messiah, then they have a special place in His kingdom and then they argued about who was the greatest. This was not about Muhammad Ali – but they were wondering who would sit at His right and His left. Jesus compassionately tried to nudge them out of that kind of thinking using a child as a teaching aid. The most humble child that knows no guilt, and knows no shame – but just knows love. Looking into the eyes of a young child, there are parents and grandparents here who have the blessing of looking into the eyes of a young child, you see an incredible love like none other, plain, and simple – not concerned with the worries of the world. God wants us to think like a child. He wants us to become more humble and simple. In first century Israel, children were not highly rated. Remember the feeding of the five thousand – there were five thousand men that were counted – and not counting the women and children, and with the feeding of the four thousand – the same thing! Today, we count all of the people. You notice in our parish we have lady acolytes; we have lady Eucharist Ministers; it is who we are. It is the DNA of our parish. We count all people. Jesus is making the point that the disciples are not going to gain

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particular favor or social standing just because they are His followers. He says that anyone who receives even a child in His name will receive Jesus Himself, and thereby will also receive ‘*the one who sent me.*’ Jesus referred to God the Father in a way that was more reminiscent of John’s Gospel. In other words, anyone at all who is associated with Jesus can have access to royalty, divinity – meaning access to God Himself and the disciples aren’t special in that – all believers are.

When you are baptized you receive the Holy Spirit. When you are Confirmed you receive the Holy Spirit again when you make the outward decision to follow Jesus. You are making the promises that were made for you a long time ago by godparents and parents. That is being a believer. You have the Holy Spirit within you. Saint Paul wrote “*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?*” (1 Corinthians 9:19) WOW! That is why the Temple veil was torn in two! So that we can access to God – and not have someone else go into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. We have access to the Holy Spirit always.

I am having the privilege of working alongside eight people across many ages as they prepare for Confirmation and Affirmation of Faith. When I see them learn new things – their faces light up, which brings to mind Jesus’ words, “*Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.*” (Mark 9:37) Jesus wants each one of us to come to Him – humble, amidst all of our worries, troubles, and cares – with the heart of a child – seeking Him, and only Him - and receiving so much more – God the Father Himself. His words from Matthew 11:28 are words to draw us to Him for peace and comfort – with the faith of a little child in belief of Him. You will hear them in a little bit during the Comfortable Words. Jesus said, “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*”

Remember it is faith, in Jesus – believing that He is the One who is the answer to all of our questions, our cares and our fears – and through that faith we don’t earn any special place – other than being with Him for all eternity. You know what – that is good enough for me! You can’t earn your way to heaven – you also cannot earn a special place in heaven – except of being in His presence. You cannot earn it – just believe!

As Jesus goes to the cross, turning upside down everything His disciples had imagined, He is also turning upside down the way people, including some Christians, still think. Listen to what Jesus told them: “*If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.*” (Mark 9:35) First must be last and then being everyone’s servant? My goodness.

It is true that the disciples would not truly understand until the Day of Pentecost, when they received the Holy Spirit in a very, very special way. It makes you wonder just how confused so many people still are. How many people need to hear about Jesus. We need to be in prayer for those who are still confused and pray for their guidance, clarity, and peace – for Jesus and His Holy Spirit to enlighten them with a beautiful spirit of simplicity – just as a child.